



The Commission on Children at the Cutting Edge



Year's Summary 2004



State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

The Commission on Children at the Cutting Edge

The Commission's Mandate

Public Act 85-584 created the Connecticut Commission on Children (COC) in 1985. The non-partisan Commission is required to promote public policies in children's best interest. Described as the most successful state coordinating entity for children in the nation, the Commission brings 25 government representatives from the legislative, executive and judicial branches together with the private sector to:

- Provide information and conduct research regarding the status of children and children's programs in the state;
- Enlist the support of leaders in business, health, and education, state and local governments and the media to improve policies and programs for children;
- Review coordination and assess programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect children;
- Serve as a liaison between government and private groups concerned with children;
- Make recommendations for children annually to the Legislature and to the Governor.

"The State of Connecticut was prescient in establishing the Connecticut Commission on Children. This organization has done excellent work in providing the legislature with the objective analysis of the knowledge base on children's issues. The Commission has been an important factor in placing Connecticut at the cutting edge of dealing with child and family concerns."

Major Research-Based Public Policies for Children

The Commission on Children leads in research and policy design for the legislature and executive branch with excellent child outcomes and reduced costs in failure. These include staffing the legislature and/or executive branch on:

- School Readiness legislation that developed preschool and a statewide infrastructure for quality early care and education. Public Act 97-259
- Early Reading Success law that provided school options for reduced class size, full day kindergarten and school reading plans. Public Act 98-243
- The Fatherhood Council to re-engage absent parents with their children. Public Act 99-193

Dr. Edward Zigler
Sterling Professor of Psychology
Yale University and Director,
Yale's Bush Center in
Child Development and Social
Policy

- The Reading Panel Report to define the skills and knowledge that teachers need to teach every child to read, leaving no child behind or unnecessarily placed in special education. Public Act 99-227
- Adoption reform promptly placing young children in permanent caring homes. Public Act 00-137
- The Safe Learning Act and Anti-Bully legislation to render learning safe for children and to reduce child aggression. Public Act 01-1
- Prevention Initiative to create a statewide prevention plan, budget and benchmarks focusing on what works early, rather than what costs later in crisis. Public Act 01-121.
- The Parent Trust Act, a parent engagement initiative to maximize substantive consumer input and citizen participation in policy. Public Act 01-2
- The Children and Homeland Security Act addressing the particular needs of children in the new and growing backdrop of terrorism. Special Act 02-8
- Lead Action for Medicaid Primary Prevention Pilot established to reduce lead hazards in dwellings of Medicaid eligible children at risk for lead poisoning. Public Act 00-216

“With devolution, local elected leaders must comprehensively understand child policy. More and more decisions are being made at the local level. The Commission on Children helps local leaders interpret and guide child and family policy.”

Joel Cogen
Executive Director
Connecticut Conference of
Municipalities

A Good Business Investment

The Commission triples dollars for the state. For every dollar the state invests in the Commission on Children, the Commission triples the resource. These dollars do not go to the Commission, but to an array of departments and public policy initiatives.

Recent examples include:

- A federal earmark in Congress, spanning three years, of 3.3 million dollars;
- Philanthropic dollars for prevention programs including the Packard and Travelers Foundations, Research!America, and The Rockefeller Family Fund.
- Small business events for homeless children including an annual haircutting fundraiser;
- Public/private matches in out-of-school time programs including the Disney Foundation.
- Private donor partnership on anti-bullying programs to include more than one million dollars for Connecticut school programs.

“Business has partnered with the Commission on Children for more than ten years. Linking the development of the child to competitiveness, quality of life and the overall strength of the economy, business leaders meet quarterly to discuss child policy issues. The business community, across small, international, corporate and moderate size businesses have been most active in school readiness, safety and prevention policy for the youngest generation. This is believed to be the most efficient, with the best outcomes for the broadest reach of children.”

David E.A. Carson
Retired CEO, People’s Bank

National Recognition

The Commission is linked to many national efforts:

- The Commission attends the National Conference of State Legislatures, overseeing policy implications for states on children's issues and facilitating forums and best practices discussions. This offers Connecticut access and familiarity with the best policy models in the nation.
- Serves as the state contact for the national I Am Your Child Campaign and consults on its products for parents.
- Serves as a consultant to the federal government in reading through the U.S. Dept. of Education Early Reading First and Reading First initiatives.
- Selected as one of six states to receive federal funds for prevention to lead the nation in prevention strategies.
- Collaborate and guide a coordinated after school strategy.
- Work in partnership with national foundations and national organizations serving children such as the Packard Foundation, the Families and Work Institute, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Family Support America.

"The Commission on Children plays a unique role in Connecticut as a communications link between citizens and the often complex processes of government. Working in partnership with local and statewide, public and private organizations, the Commission has helped many who are working on behalf of children to be heard more clearly in the public arena."

David M. Nee
Executive Director
William Caspar Graustein
Memorial Fund

Extensive Public Information and Targeted Policy Research

- Release annually the *Social State of Connecticut* that reports to the General Assembly and public each year on key social and health indicators affecting quality of life;
- Serves as an expert guest on Connecticut NBC television once or twice a month regarding child and family concerns;
- Writes and disseminates more than two million booklets for parents on preparing children for school, selecting quality child care, helping children read and children's health issues;
- Hosts public forums as well as television and talk shows on pivotal issues including early literacy, fatherhood, preschool, adoption of children, tobacco as a pediatric illness, children's mental health and neighborhood safety;
- Coordinates longitudinal research on the implications of preschool on the achievement gap and K-3 teacher training in reading and outcomes in school performance;
- Analyzes the impact of bullying in schools and neighborhoods;
- Compiles international and national research on the elimination of race bias through early exposure to diversity among young children;
- Determines the impact of parent engagement on child outcomes and community health;
- Responds to public inquiry and community requests regarding children on the average of 350 requests per week;
- Assesses the impact of terrorism on children. Facilitated a report that specifically addresses children and homeland security; and
- Determines strength and gaps in policy regarding young children, birth to eight.

"The Connecticut Commission is unique among the active governance bodies surveyed by the Family Impact seminar. The Commission and its staff, by nearly all accounts, perform a valuable catalyzing and coordinating role on behalf of better and better-coordinated services to young children and their families. Known for its facility at mobilizing both public and private stakeholders and creating effective public education campaigns, the Commission is perhaps most valuable as an influential advisor to all branches of government and as a site for the negotiations of state and family and child policy."

*Coming Together for
Children and Families
How Cabinet-level Collaboration is
Changing State Policymaking
Published by the Family
Impact Seminar*

Leadership Development and Capacity-Building

The Commission builds the skills of the public to improve consumer input for elected officials, bolster civic engagement and to ensure working policies for children and families. This includes:

- An ongoing partnership with mayors on School Readiness;
- A nationally recognized Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) in 12 cities to help parents become the advocates for children;
- A Business Advisory Committee comprised of executives from small and large businesses to look at competitiveness and child policy implications;
- A website for youth to access information on civics, government, and history;
- A youth advisory to offer input into potential and existing laws;
- A prevention advisory comprised of judges, mayors and child policy experts to review prevention and to expand its potential in the interest of cost savings and proven child outcomes; and
- A partnership with the National League of Cities, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Connecticut towns on child obesity.

“Whatever the issue may be, the Commission seeks out the authoritative information, identifies the knowledgeable leaders in the field and defines the best practices. In doing so, the Commission informs the legislative process and the general public on those policies that have proven effective in advancing the health and well being of children. If we didn’t have the Commission, we would have to invent it.”

Peter Libassi
Former President
Children’s Fund of Connecticut
and Child Health and
Development Institute

